# Solution Protects School Programs, Avoids Layoffs

**Department of Education**

**News Releases**

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Government and school board officials have reached a working agreement that will protect classroom priorities -- and avoid layoffs for teachers. The agreement -- funded from within existing budget envelopes -- includes debt-relief for school boards, administrative reductions, and assistance to address other board pressures.

"On budget day, I said we would protect students in the classroom -- and avoid layoffs for teachers," Education Minister Jane Purves said. "I said it then. I say it today, and school boards are now saying it too."

The agreement will relieve school boards of about $27-million in deficit, bridge financing, and public service award liabilities. This provides an immediate $13.2-million benefit to school boards, based on this years' budgeted payment, plus the balance of relief in future years.

"It is simply not fair for children in classrooms today to pay for shortfalls from the past," said the minister. "We plan to develop a new approach to education funding, and school boards deserve to start off with a clean slate -- as we did with health boards."

The province will provide $10 million to help with salary increases for non-teaching staff, contract changes and other work force adjustments. School boards will also receive $10.6 million from existing sources with the Department of Education's budget to protect teaching positions, as it is expected that less than the estimated 400 teachers take the early retirement, part-time or leave options open to them.

This combination of measures will provide funding relief in the amount of $33.8 million. School boards have tallied funding pressures totalling more than $50 million. They are expected to identify about $20 million by reducing administration and other areas of their budget.

School boards will still be required to make some tough decisions. Declining enrolments -- down by 3.5 per cent in the last four years, and projected to drop by 6.5 per cent more over the next five years -- should help school boards manage these reductions.

These measures have no effect on the province's bottom line, or the projected deficit. They are funded within the budget envelope

for the Department of Education, and a government restructuring budget line.

Over the longer term, Ms. Purves said significant changes are needed in the Department of Education's relationship with school boards to avoid the education budget concerns that have been heard every spring in recent memory.

"Government, which writes the cheque, simply must have better information on how that cheque is spent," said Ms. Purves. "We will continue working with school boards on ways we can improve this process."

Government and school boards will confirm the details of these solutions early next week.

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FOR BROADCAST USE:

A working agreement has been reached between government and school boards on educational funding.

Education Minister Jane Purves says the deal will avoid teacher lay offs and protect the classroom.

School boards will get debt-relief and other help to cover financial pressures.

In turn, school boards will find savings in administration and other areas.

The combination of measures will provide funding relief in the amount of almost 34-million dollars but it will have no effect on the province's bottom line or the projected deficit.

The working agreement was reached following talks between education and school board officials on Friday.

The agreement will be presented to cabinet early next week.

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